**Destination Groton Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Wednesday July 19, 2022**

**2pm**

**First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

**Present:** **Greg Sheldon, Jeff Gordon, Mairi Elliott, Joni Parker-Roach, Julie Platt**

Attendees: Judy Anderson, Takashi Tada, John Sopka

**Guests:** Dan Sena State Representative 37th district, Dan Szatela Legislative Aide, Deb Buckley, AJ Pecukonis

**Meeting opened by Greg Sheldon at 2:03pm**

**Agenda Item 1- Representative Dan Sena, Legistative Aide Dan Szatela**

Representative Sena opens by telling the committee that he is new to the district and his goal is to get all of his districts new funding.

GSheldon then runs through the GBA report and describes the $80mil project of Groton Hill Music. He then invites Rep. Sena for a tour of GHM sometime closer to the Fall. Mr. Sena expresses interest in doing so. Sheldon goes on to explain that we are addressing challenges and opportunities with traffic being at the top of the list. JGordon strongly encourages the state Rep to take the tour to get a full understanding of the scope of the project. GSheldon mentions that Senator Cronin is planning a visit in September. Representative Sena agrees to make it a priority. GSheldon tells Rep. Sena about the other locations that were studied for the GBA report. He also states that there are regional traffic issues that we alone cannot solve.

Rep. Sena asks what our bordering towns are. We tell him. JPlatt mentions that we are the largest town in Middlesex county. GSheldon states that while Ayer has a growing commercial industry we have remained more rural. He also states that Nationally MA ranks last in amount of conservation area but Groton is the highest in MA. He tells the Rep. that we are a fine dining and wedding destination. He tells him of the study that was done pointing to the $21mil in economic impact that GHM is proposed to have over the next 3 years. He wraps up his remarks with the fact that the GBA report had 23 findings and 2 recommendations which included creating the Destination Groton Committee and hiring and Economic Development specialist. He also lays out that we have a culminating goal of 8 years from now at our 375th anniversary.

Representative Sena states that he is happy to be an advocate for us in the future with Earmark requests and Department of Transportation. He states projects of this scale usually take 5-10 years. He states he has a great partnership with Cronin’s office and works collaboratively with them. He then asks about hotels in town. He is informed of the Groton Inn with 60 rooms and the nearby 500pluss rooms in Ayer, Devens, Littleton and Westford. Rep. Sena states that he has had success in the past with Earmark requests and he is willing to work with us for future requests. He encourages submitting any requests when we might have them regardless of deadlines as sometimes openings come up and if the ask is in the right hands it gets brought to the table much faster. He states that asks of around $50 to 100K are more successful as the entire district is generally allotted $500k.

GSheldon goes on to tell Rep. Sena about our strategy with town funding for a matching grant from MOTT.

JParker-Roach mentions that our charter is not just economic development but also for tourism and arts and culture promotion. GSheldon adds that signage and creating a more pedestrian friendly downtown are important pieces to the puzzle that we may need state funding for. He tells the Rep. of the meeting we just had with the Pepperell officials and that there is a real sense of regional partnership. He brings up the One North Central plan for the region and would like guidance on fitting us in to that. He brings up a statistic of 25mil visitors to MA and 70% are by car. He believes making Groton a Destination will help us to capture and promote our region.

Rep. Sena states that the GBA report is valuable to them to understand what they are fighting for in our district.

JGordon asks the Rep to explain the Earmark process.

He explains that when there is excess revenue, that money can be filed as an amendment to the budget. He has yet to see a rhyme or a reason what gets approved or denied and that it can be frustrating. He tells the committee that he hopes for a future with term limits. He suggests that we get the Speaker of the house to come on a tour of GHM as well. He also suggests more Senate leadership be invited. Committee will arrange for a visit for Rep Sena first and then will coordinate to get the leadership on a tour.

MElliott asks about types of things funded by earmarks and wonders if having a position in our requests was not helpful.

Rep. Sena replies that Congress people and Senators enjoy having their name on a specific project and it is somewhat harder to get the recognition from a salaried position. His guess is that that was not helpful.

Judy Anderson ask how often Earmarks become available. The Rep replied with generally once a year, but it is always good for a requesting party to have their requests in the office because occasionally some additional funding comes up and they can then turn and immediately make an argument for them on the floor.

GSheldon recognizes that it would be good for us to have request in his office ready to go for the next round.

Dan Szatela states that it does not need to be a line-item request but it should convey why what we are requesting is important to the town.

Rep. Sena states that he has areas that he he specifically likes to champion for and our work is among them. He suggests coming to a Representative committee meeting to explain the need for a specific request.

JGordon brings up that it will be a regional effort to improve our infrastructure to handle the GHM. He explains that some residents don’t want any changes to the town. He asks advice of the Representative on how he helps to sway public opinion. The Representative replies that education of the constituents is key, JGordon the asks the State Rep if he would be willing to write something in support of us after is his tour of GHM to the MA State leadership. The Rep states he is willing to do that.

**Agenda Item 2- Marketing, AJ Pecukonis, Deb Buckley**

JGordon starts by updating committee that AJ has competed several vidoes for local businesses (paid for by businesses). He would like AJ to get videos of Takashi Tada and the Selectboard.

MElliott will email list of locations identified previously that the committee would like to have included in video roll.

Deb Buckley asks the group if they had a chance to look at websites for examples to draw from. JParker-Roach starts with the website for Nice France and Monterey California pointing to the abundance of beautiful photos as her reasoning. She mentions wanting to have an ability on our website for individuals to upload photos taken in town. GSheldon brings up the North of Boston website being a good example of a Regional website. He asks if we should start with Groton as the gateway to towns in the region?

DBuckley asks of the group to think of 1) the branding track we are taking 20 the tonality of the site 3) web navigation and keyword determination

JPlatt brings up our desire to have the calendar the David Wang is developing for town events to be added to our website.

GSheldon brings up that advisory groups we are planning to create and would like a place to be able to discuss the identified challenges in town i.e traffic, signage, bathrooms, and speed of cars through town.

Deb Buckley asks if we would like a form for people to sign up to volunteer for these committees added the website.

Audience member John Sopka adds that he feels it is important to have some bifurcation between Groton exposure and the “Destination project”. He also feels that it would be polite of us to ask for permission to promote things before we do of each item that we chose to promote for example the trails committee and for us to meet with the heads of the committees.

APecukonis states that he is currently working with businesses in town that have asked for this type of promotion and will be meeting with the town committees as we have identified to work on their videos with their permission and guidance.

The idea of a Guidebook for the town came up and was discussed.

DBuckley then asks for a timeline of expectations

GSheldon replies that we are putting together a report for the Selectboard in September and that we would like to have the Website by then or at the latest by town meeting October 22 20022.

JPlatt feels that have a full website to deliver in September is not reasonable especially considering the committee is taking August off.

DBuckley states that we can get to the branding and log stage by September but not likely to have a deliverable website in that timeframe.

GSheldon would like to have our website advertised in the Fall issue of Nashoba Valley Living and states that it may not be out until November and asked it would be reasonable to have the beginnings of the website up by then. DBuckley thinks that if we work through August we could get that done.

DBuckley leaves the meeting at 3:45pm

**Agenda Item 3- Other issues**

GSheldon then asks the committee who would like to be point person with Nashoba Valley. MElliott volunteers as she brought him in. She will touch base with Gary Forzese and coordinate.

GSheldon reminds committee of meeting with Mark Haddad on 7/27 and states he would like to ask Mark about setting up a meeting with the Select Board sometime after Labor Day.

**Survey-**

Sheldon asks if the committee should do a town wide survey to be distributed via GELD? He then hands out samples of the survey that was put out a few years ago and noted that it uncovered that nearly 70% of participants were in favor of the Prescott School project.

**Infrastructure-**

Sheldon states that we need to start identifying funding sources to start solving some of the issues we have identified.

**Executive Plan-**

Sheldon opens a discussion on an Executive plan to be presented at Fall Town Meeting. He lays out that the GBA report was aplanning document and what we will create is an Action Plan.

He would like to have our advisory groups identified by then so that we can put their names in the report.

JPlatt reminds Sheldon of the list of names we have already created for advisory groups.

**Earl Carter-**

Sheldon states that he has scheduled a meeting with Richard Chilcoate and the Groton History center on August 5 at 4pm. JParker-Roach states she has moved a class and will attend. JPlatt will be out of town. JPlatt then brings up that she heard about a $350 million grant received for the town of Littleton granted by Mass Cultural Council calleda Portfolio grant. She then read the criteria of the grant and its possible applications.

MElliott points out that the Earl Carter Museum would fall into those criteria.

GSheldon agrees that is worth looking in to.

**Motion to adjourn made by Julie Platt at 4:28pm- 2nd by Joni Parker-Roach-**

**All approved- Mairi Elliott, Jeff Gordon, Greg Sheldon**